Reflections from Webinar with Robin Goettel on 4/11/13

*Ideas for Building Partnerships, Part II: In-Kind Collaboration*

Michigan

Sara Furtah - St. Mary's School in Rockwood, MI: We have a nearby quarry that would be a good partnership. They have donated one large boulder for decoration on a garden, but have also been a good field trip site for our older science students. They may not be able to give us monetary support, but may be able to provide us with more material as our rain gardens and anti-erosion projects are more underway. Free material saves money. Another good source may be a local nursery. Again, they probably won't give us funds, but may help with planting suggestions and plants themselves. Students could build a lasting relationship by visiting these places with their families, sending thank you notes with pictures and descriptions of the projects, and by interacting with the gardens and provided material often during class.

Barb Winkfield, Lone Pine Elementary, Bloomfield Hills, MI: Last Monday, April 8, I presented a PowerPoint to the P.T.0. at my school to educate parents about the benefits of involving students in the natural world and to generate their interest in funding legacy projects to enhance our school yard with an outdoor classroom, raised beds, etc. I shared information from our EPS webinars. The Lone Pine P.T.O was amazed with the information that I shared with them and very enthusiastic about funding such projects over time. They started to discuss how families could buy bricks, etc. and how money from our biggest fund raising event could be used to support the school yard legacy project. In addition, one of our parent’s owns a major landscaping company in our area and donated rocks, sand, and other materials for a rain garden at our school site. Later in the week, I shared the presentation at our staff meeting and all the teachers were excited about the prospect of an outdoor classroom at our school. The kindergarten teacher asked for the information to share with her church to spark interest in an outdoor class room at their site. After, I reflected on this, I realized that outdoor education is appropriate in many arenas. It provides equity access for all and invites participation in diversity of thoughts and cultures.

Ann Marie Sadler, Hillside MS, Northville, MI: Our Mother's Club, a group of parents that raise money for the schools, is one group that I always turn to first. Once a year they offer grants to teachers in the district that will impact students with innovative ideas. I was able to get supplies for a Grow Lab last year from this group. Writing thank you notes and showing them what you have done with the funding goes a long way. We also have Maybury State Park down the street that is great for bringing in speakers. They are always willing to work with us, especially since we are a local school.

Isaac Cottrell, Hillside MS, Northville, MI: Think about internal partnerships too. We are working with our operations department on a project to build an outdoor classroom space that will include a pond that will be fed by downspouts from the school roof. They are bringing in their back hoe to dig the pond as soon as the ground dries out a touch. Our kids get to learn about the districts storm water permitting and management plan. As part of the permitting our district it's required to educate the public about storm water management. We are of course helping them with this aspect while working through this project. These projects are also shared with the public in a variety of ways which also benefits the district... win-win! We have also developed a relationship with the districts environmental consulting firm which has offered to speak to the kids and bring in a camera so the kids can explore our storm water drain system.

Alyssa Merten, Muskegon, MI: As Isaac mentioned...partnering with your municipality or whomever they contract with to meet their Phase II stormwater permits can be an excellent idea. They have community education requirements and working with a school group to implement a community education campaign on a topic relating to storm water essentially kills two birds with one stone. Another idea is partnering with your local city/municipality dept of public works. We are piloting a program with one local municipality to have students plant a tree seedling nursery on school grounds. The native trees will belong to the City and will be dug up later and used for municipal street trees and park projects. This is a win/win for both groups as the trees are quite cheap to purchase as seedlings so the City can save lots of money by not buying large established trees and the educational opportunity for the students is great! I will also mention contacting your local watershed organization. They often have money for projects or will help you look for funding.

Jenn Coury, Lake Orion, MI: Your local watershed council (as suggested by Alyssa) is a great resource. The Clinton River Watershed Council in SE MI has a great Stream Leaders program that brings in volunteers from GM to help out on stream sampling days. We're actually headed out this Friday to spend the day on the stream! I also like Isaac’s comment about internal partnerships - having support from within your building or district is essential to make a lasting change. Also, I attended an environmental ed workshop during Earth Week, and the facilitator mentioned that Earth Week is a great time to ask for money or donations from businesses like Home Depot. He suggested a short letter and a conversation to build relationships.

Virginia Callaghan, Fisher MS, Detroit MI: One partnership that my school is building on is with the organization Greening of Detroit. We are planning and putting in a rain garden with the eighth graders and butterfly gardens with the fifth graders. At present we are trying to find a second partner. I am going to try to speak with Gardner White who has partnered with our school in the past.

Wisconsin

Jessica Foster, Fernwood Montessori School, Milwaukee: Right now there is a group of teachers at my school working with people from the Urban Ecology Center to help with greening our playground and revitalizing our rain garden. They are helping us with their expertise and knowledge of Wisconsin native plants and garden design as well as how to effectively involve the students in the process of design and implementation. We are also working with a fundraising group that is an offshoot of our PTO. They are working to help fund our projects as well as to help with ideas and encourage parent participation when we get to the physical labor part of the process. I have worked with the Great Lakes Alliance in the past to help organize a shoreline cleanup for my class and to get tools for water monitoring.

Malgorzata Kutynia, Fernwood Montessori School, Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee Municipal Sewage District is a government agency that advocates sustainable practices to protect Lake Michigan. They offer free workshops for educators as well as free field trips for students. In the past, they even used to give grants to anyone who was interested in creating rain gardens. Right now, I think, they just offer discounts on plants. Last month, a group of teachers from my school participated in a workshop and a tour of the MMSD that was offered for MPS teachers. Each of them received a free water curriculum guide along with the materials. (Next workshop is going to take place at the end of May.) Even though I never inquired about the possibility of receiving founds from MMSD, I believe they could be a good potential source.

Mark Johnson, Fernwood Montessori School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Our school works with the Urban Ecology Center in Milwaukee. We have a separate school funding group which has funded a field trip for each class to work with the UEC. This has a multiplier effect in that students go home and turn their families on to resources at the Urban Ecology Center. One of our school projects is a school rain garden. The City of Milwaukee waste-water treatment is managed by Violea. They have a strong education program. They sponsor training and materials for teachers to teach waste-water treatment science. One of the materials they provide is the "Water Box". I have spent untold hours studying the science of water quality. The training provided by Violea immediately provided new understanding for me. Every jurisdiction will have water treatment and storm-water control agencies which might be resources for schools.

Allison Gipp, South Milwaukee High School: In my school I could imagine partnering with the Milwaukee County Parks system, Grant Park is very close. Also, someone previously mentioned the Milwaukee Municipal Sewage District, there is a water treatment facility in Oak Creek that might be interesting to check out. In addition, partnering with senior centers, day cares, libraries, etc. and doing volunteer work together in a service learning project which includes work outdoors.

A Biondo, Merton, Wisconsin: Within the school our PTO has a "Garden Club" to help with project goals.   
Urban Ecology Center in Milwaukee came to our school to help in a variety of ways. I created a donation list/wish list flyer and sent home to all the families- you never know what resources/donations/connections can be made if you do not ask! I also heard the county has free mulch/wood chips for our garden. I will soon find out!! Again, NEVER HURTS TO ASK. Asking gives me a great opportunity to share and educate others.

Hart Ford -- Urban Ecology Center, Milwaukee, WI: While teaching at the Hmong American Peace Academy, I focused my units around the data and observations that students gathered on field trips.  
At the Mitchell Park Domes, student collected data on the density of stomata on rainforest and desert plant leaves and drew pictures of the different plant adaptations they observed. At Havenwood State Forest, students collected water quality data at several ponds and compared the arthropod communities in the prairie and forest.

Laura Bensman, Pierce Elementary School, Milwaukee WI: We currently have a fantastic relationship with the Urban Ecology Center. They work closely with us on planning field trips that complement our classroom studies and facilitate real world experiences with our students. I would love to work more closely with Growing Power, not so much for funding but as a community resource. It would be great if we could create a community between our parents, students and groups like Growing Power to help create a healthier and more sustainable community and build positive relationships in the community. While they are not directly involved in the "water" part, everything is connected. Frankly, our school also needs to build a PTO that can facilitate some of the community building.

Gena Gonzales, K4, Pierce, Milwaukee: Urban Ecology Center (Riverside Park location) is a local non-profit that our school is partners with. I forgot to mention in the funding section that each class at our school has two fieldtrips with UEC, and I think this is funded by a grant through them for outdoor education. I could also see possibly partnering with Milwaukee's Victory Garden Initiative, if we wanted to something related to growing food, school-yard vegetable garden.

Deb Anderson, Richland Middle School, Richland Center, WI: I have had a couple of local/county people, water and soil experts, who have volunteered time and soil test kits to my stream monitoring enrichment class and computer application's class, along with a DNR forester and fish shocker who donated time and tree booklets. Recently, the DNR forester referred me to a nursery in Boscobel and shared an application to become a school forest for a reforestation idea I would like to plant; if approved as a school forest, my understanding is that trees and shrubs are free. He is very willing to help plant the trees, too.

Gretchen Kanable, Richland Middle School: We are currently partnering with several agencies. We are partnering with our local Park and Recreation Center (who employees our City Forester) to sponsor around 1000 trees that we will be planting this spring on school grounds to start a school woodland. We have also utilized one of our local DNR forestry consultants to help students identify and recognize trees on our school grounds. Other resources available to would be the UW-Extension Office Resource Agent.

Betty Downs, Madison Wisconsin, MMSD naturalist educator: Partnering with Friends groups works well. We partner with Friends of the Madison School Forest and Friends of Cherokee Marsh. Friends of the Madison School Forest provide funding for naturalists fees and busing for second trips to the school forest for MMSD classes that took a first trip funded by the school district. This covers about 8-10 second visits to the school forest. Friends of Cherokee Marsh has provided some limited funding for busing to Cherokee Marsh. The school district provides funding for naturalist fees but not transportation. Friends groups can also be partners for WEEB and other grants needing a nonprofit partner. The Wisconsin K-12 Forestry Education Program LEAF has provided in service training for MMSD teachers and naturalists at the Madison School Forest campground the past 2 falls. They provide curriculum materials as well as training. Upper Sugar River Watershed Alliance is another group that would be a good source of support. The Madison School Forest is in the Upper Sugar River Watershed even though there is not water source located on the forest property we do obtain water from a well and the Sugar River is not far away. The Madison School District works with the WDNR Natural Areas managers to manage the school forest. They provide prescribed burning and invasive species management for the Olson Oak Woods State Natural Area located within the Madison School Forest. They also provide assistance and advice for management of the sections of the school forest outside the SNA.

Ohio

Lisa Headley, Copley-Fairlawn: I have always asked our PTA for assistance on outdoor learning projects. They have always responded with at least part of the funding for the project. It is easy to maintain a relationship with our PTA because their children are in the building and they are usually the parents that are involved in several activities at our school. Also, I have used Ohio Department of Natural Resources. I had a wildlife officer come into my classroom to teach many outdoor activities including fun facts about indigenous plants and animals.  

Meredith Morgan Copley-Fairlawn grade 2: I worked with a great PTA mom a number of years ago- we were able to get a grant for raised beds thru Summit county Master Gardeners. I'm intrigued by Urban Ecology Center- not familiar. The NSTA sends a newspaper-format mag each month and they always have lists of freebies for science teachers as well as ideas for applying for grants. I'm wondering about the No Child Left Inside movement. Not sure if they have grants. Our county park system offers free nature walks- led by naturalists and trained volunteers. So just the bus expense would need to be covered- although our system is covering it at present.

Bridget Mattler, 1st grade, Fort Island Elementary, Copley, OH:   My first thought was to involve the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and the Summit County Parks Department along with our fantastic PTO who have recently begun a garden club and are interested in getting projects started with the students. I think the parents are anxious to help. We teachers are feeling so burdened by assessments that our time (such a valuable resource) is very limited for outdoor learning projects. By involving the parents and other community members more, our limited time can be used most efficiently.

Robyn Selent, Riverside High School, Painesville, OH: We have two nearby park systems, lake metro parks and Geauga park district that offers many school programs for students preschool through high school. There are various types of programs and content areas that link to the Ohio academic standards. Many require travel to the various metro parks and some are at your school. Depending on if your school is in the park county help with funding is available. We also have another place in the area that would be a potential partner, the Holden arboretum which like the two already mentioned, has both professional development opportunities for teachers, as well as, educational programs for students, lectures and workshop. These are all geared to lesson based outdoor experiences.

Anne Schoeffler, Seton Catholic School, Hudson, OH: Our school is connected (via a trail built by an Eagle Scout 15 years ago) to a large city park. We monitor the water quality of a small stream in that park and will be going there on Friday to pull invasive garlic mustard; the park district will removed the bagged garlic mustard. We are also making connections with a watershed management group for the creek to which that park/creek contributes.

Kristen Lamb, Cleveland, Ohio, Gallagher School: A few of the organizations that I think that I could partnership with would be the Cleveland Metroparks. They have many programs for students and adults to enhance learning and participating in the outdoors. They offer programs during the summer for teachers, as well as for kids of all ages. They even do programs called "Stroller Science" for the very little ones. I think that they do school based programs as well. A part of the Cleveland Metroparks is also the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo. They also do school based programs as well as summer camps for kids and graduate work for teachers. I think that using these as partners would provide an immense amount of information and support in enriching student learning.

Scott Trahey, Old Trail School, Bath, Ohio: Our school is located in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, which I think is very unique. Partnering with the national park is often a priority of ours. Several of our classes also take advantage of the Cuyahoga Valley Environmental Education Center. Our 5th graders do a retreat there over the course of a week. Another partner for our school could be the Summit County Metro Parks. There are parks for hiking all over our area and the Seiberling Nature Realm is a great place to connect students with nature.

Alice Goumas Old Trail School, Bath, Ohio: I feel lucky being a school located in the middle of a national park - we are creating a small wetland and the park plant/wetland experts are advising. We are developing a service learning partnership/relationship where our students will help in the park's green houses. The students can do some of the more labor intensive things like transplanting from a tray to a small pot. The school will also help with the propagation of native, wetland plants in our green house because ours is heated. We will then be able to have plants to add to our wetland every year. These plants will be grown from seeds that have been collected locally, by park volunteers and grown by our students. From what I have learned is that most organizations or departments are very willing to help advise. I have established another relationship with the Forestry Service - identifying and mapping the trees on the campus. As long as the projects do not involve funding - just time it seems easy enough to get experts in a field to come to school.

LaVonne Szafranski, Fifth Grade, Westlake City Schools, Westlake, OH: I, too, have had many positive experiences working with our PTA. I think I shared earlier that 2 years ago, I received a mini-grant for folding campstools and clipboards to be used for outdoor classroom activities. Just yesterday, we went outside to work on our “Dinner Food Webs” not really an activity that needed to be outside but it was 65 degrees! Because I’ve trained the students to view our spot outdoors as an extension of our classroom, we were able to be very productive. Another community resource that has been very instrumental in helping the schools is a local company, EverReady. This wonderful company has not only donated batteries for our electricity unit, they have given our school several learning units and allowed several classes to tour the facilities. They are a great neighbor to have!

Natalie Masalko, Coventry High School, Akron, Ohio: There is an Island in Lake Erie with science research facilities called the Stone Lab. This facility is owned and run by The Ohio State University. There are various ways to have this experience, whether you decide on a day trip, with tour, or take advantage of the overnight trip, complete with sleeping quarters, meals and educational experiments. These trips can be expensive. When partnering with Ohio State, there are grants available that can cover nearly all the cost to your school. Our school takes a group of 6th graders every spring. They take charter buses and the students are responsible for a small fee. It is a great experience and the kids do many experiments with the water and various species that are found there. It is something they really look forward to.

Pennsylvania/New York

Loretta Miller, Ripley Central School, Ripley, NY/North East, PA: Our team has several partners in our No-mow Zone project. Mercyhurst University and the Scouts have provided manpower. North East in Bloom may be both a source for workers and funding. Kitty Maloney has presented to the North East Garden Club that may be a possible funding source.